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The intelligence community's 'private sector'

Guild exposes right-wing spy unit

By STEVE MANNING

Spying, wiretapping, assassinations—the crimes of U.S. intelligence agencies have been unearthed and exposed with numbing regularity over the past five years.

Now evidence is emerging that a parallel right-wing intelligence network, working with government agencies and tied to the John Birch Society, corporate security services and church groups, is in operation across the U.S. Extensive investigations by the National Lawyers' Guild (NLG) and others have begun to piece together a picture of the intelligence community's "private sector."

INFORMATION DIGEST

At its center is a mysterious right-wing figure named John Rees. For the past 10 years Rees has written and distributed Information Digest (ID), a sophisticated, right-wing intelligence newsletter which has supplied police departments throughout the country with derogatory information on the left. Other subscribers to the biweekly compendium of "left-wing intelligence" have included the CIA, the National Security Agency and the FBI.

ID first came to public attention through a 1976 investigation of police abuses by the New York Office of Legislative Oversight. It was discovered then that the New York State Police regularly used ID as a "confidential informant."

"Names mentioned negatively in the publication," the New York report states, were used "to develop dossiers on thousands of Americans who had committed no crime and were not suspected of committing a crime." Over 60 police departments used ID, and according to records released under the Freedom of Information Act, the CIA regularly integrated ID's reports into their own intelligence files.

ID itself is a mixture of newspaper clippings, left-wing gossip, stolen documents and intelligence gleaned from "sources active in radical, so-called revolutionary groups."

One 1973 copy of ID in possession of the NLG contains detailed reports on the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, an anti-war planning conference "together with a list of participants," Puerto Rican "nationalist" groups and "brief notes" from cities around the country.

SPYING ON THE LEFT

Another issue records names and phone numbers of celebrities deemed likely to support left and liberal causes—with entries as varied as Dustin Hoffman, Sal Mineo and Barbara Dane. "To protect sources," ID warns, "this material should not be used in this format. It is also noted that every attempt was made to restore this list to its owner, without success, as it is realized that under certain circumstances the publishing of stolen lists is illegal." Obligingly, the New York State Police stamped every page: "The information contained herein is of a classified nature, intended solely for the use of the N.Y. State Police and any other agency authorized by them."

More recently ID turned up as the New Hampshire State Police's intelligence source on the antinuclear Clamshell Alliance. ID's material on the group was passed to the police by the U.S. Labor Party—itself a suspected right-wing front group—and used by New Hampshire Gov. Meldrin Thompson in a widely publicized speech denouncing Clamshell as a "cover for terrorist activity."

And last month Rees launched a McCarthyite smear campaign against Guardian correspondent Wilfred Burchett in one of ID's favorite above-ground outlets, the John Birch Society's Review of the News.

While the N.Y. State report characterizes ID as the "string that held together a nationwide network of hidden informants," there the inquiry stops. Nor does the report explain how the ID network is funded or its information distributed. However, according to a recently released investigation by the National Laywers Guild, Rees has received ample support from cooperative police departments and right-wing organizations since his arrival here from Britain in 1963.

In 1969 Rees surfaced as the editor of the National Laymans Digest, a blacklisting publication of the ultraright Church League of America. According to the Church League's publicity, its research library in Wheaton, Ill., contains the nation's "largest and most comprehensive files on subversive activity, with the single exception of the FBI... instantly available to every police department and security agency in the country."

LINKS TO CONGRESS...

By the early 1970s Rees, now working with his wife Louise, managed to infiltrate a number of Washington, D.C., area left groups—including the Institute for Policy Studies and the NLG—as agents of the Washington and Maryland State Police. After a year with the NLG, Louise disappeared, only to show up in 1974 as a staff member for the House Internal Security Committee. That same year, NLG investigators discovered, the Maryland State Police obtained and paid for a post office box for Information Digest correspondence. Also authorized to pick up the mail was John Norpel, until 1975 research director for the Senate Internal Security Committee.

Louise Rees is presently staff assistant to Rep. Larry McDonald (D-Ga.), who serves as the congressional "outpost" for the ID network. A member of the John Birch Society's national council, McDonald regularly inserts hundreds of pages of material on "subversives" into the congressional record, most of it either written by the Reeses or culled from the files of the Church League or other right-wing groups.

Journalists and researchers investigating McDonald's activities believe ID's files have been secretly transferred into the congressman's Capitol Hill office, apparently to avoid court subpoenas for the material. Both the Reeses are the targets of lawsuits brought by the Institute for Policy Studies, the Socialist Workers Party and the NLG.

...AND CORPORATE POLICE

Yet another intriguing aspect of the Rees operation is their connection to corporate police forces. John Rees has worked on and off for the Wackenut Corp., one of the nation's largest security and investigative services as including "preemployment screening, polygraph examinations, counter business espionage, internal intelligence and general criminal, fraud and arson investigations." John Ammarelli, the company's vice president, recently admitted before a congressional commission that Wackenut has maintained 300,000 files for the purpose of keeping industry informed about subversive activities. The data was obtained from the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Church League of America.

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